



**Testimony submitted to the Appropriations Committee on H.B. 6659 An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2025, and Making Appropriations Therefor**

February 23, 2023

Co-chairs Senator Osten and Representative Walker, Ranking Members Senator Berthel and Representative Nuccio, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

I am Pastor Marjo Anderson. I've lived in New Haven since 1977, and I've pastored in Connecticut since 1986, in New Britain, Branford, and Bridgeport. For the last 12 years, I have pastored at Salem Lutheran Church in Bridgeport.

**I am here to oppose H.B. 6659 because we need a budget that addresses the terrible inequities our children face every day.**

Salem Lutheran Church sits on Park Avenue, on the Fairfield/Bridgeport line. How much difference does an invisible line make? It almost can't be quantified.

I had children in my congregation from Bridgeport who graduated high school and could barely read and children from the suburbs who went on to Ivy League schools. There are children in Fairfield who go to school in state-of-the-art, air-conditioned facilities, and children in Bridgeport who go to school without access to safe drinking water.

I want to spend a moment on that last point. The Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport was asked to provide bottled water for students who attended a school where lead was found in the pipes. But why do we have to have bottled water? Why don't we just fix the plumbing? This, I'm afraid, is a metaphor for our entire education system in Connecticut. We have a patchwork of churches, nonprofits, and social services agencies doing their best to put bandaids on life-threatening wounds, but that is simply not good enough.

You can see it clear as day as you look out across Park Avenue: The underlying cause is funding.



**Our children of color get far less funding than their white peers. That is not fair. It's not just.**

Much of Connecticut can retreat into their "white bubble" and pretend this isn't happening. I know. I used to live in that white bubble.

Five years ago, we were sharing space with a Jamaican Pentecostal congregation, and I was suffering from depression. Nothing worked – not medication and not talk therapy. For some reason, I asked the pastor from the Jamaican congregation to pray for me and he said, sure, I'll pray for you, but first, let's talk. That was the first day in 2 years that we really talked - and to my great surprise, I found we had so much in common. He ended up being one of the best friends I've ever had and that changed everything for me – my life, my faith, and the way I see the world. Having stepped out of my bland white bubble, I discovered a beautiful, amazing, colorful, vibrant world – full of more challenges than I had ever seen but also filled with far greater joy.

That pastor and the members of his congregation, and their children and grandchildren, deserve the same access to a high-quality education as students in my congregation who come from the wealthiest suburbs.

Here in Connecticut, we have so much in common, but we let inequity continue to divide us. We must fund ONE educational system that fairly funds ALL Connecticut children. And since the current version of the budget fails to do so, we must oppose the current version of the budget.

Please oppose H.B. 6659.

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